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Conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 65/259, requested the Secretary-General to report the conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality to the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session for consideration.

The present report provides information on the evolution of the Working Group and the work undertaken to date to develop a programme criticality framework. It should be noted that the report provides an interim update on the activities of the Working Group and does not include its final conclusions.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 65/259, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report the conclusions of the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality to the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session for consideration. It is to be recalled that paragraphs 9 to 22 of the report of the Secretary-General on the revised security management framework and revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011 under section 5, Peacekeeping operations related to a strengthened and unified security management system for the United Nations (A/65/320 and Corr.1), contained an overview of the measures taken to support the broader United Nations security risk management process. Paragraphs 21 and 22 of that report provided information on the guidelines for acceptable risk, which had been approved by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination in April 2009 and embodied a key principle, that is, the need to balance security risk and programme opportunity, requiring a systematic approach to determining programme opportunities, particularly for high-risk activities. Essentially, the guidelines had been developed in support of the "how to stay" approach and were intended to describe how the Organization could accept higher levels of residual risk when there was a need to implement vital programmes. Field testing of the Guidelines, while successfully piloted, had identified the need for greater clarity in the security risk management model with respect to determining programme criticality. Specifically, there was a need for clear definitions and the establishment of a clear framework for decision-making. In June 2010, in order to address this need, the High-level Committee on Management formed the Working Group on Programme Criticality, with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as Chair. The Working Group was tasked with defining four levels of programme criticality and developing a common framework for informing decision-making within the guidelines for acceptable risk.

2. Having considered the aforementioned report of the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in paragraph 12 of its related report of 15 November 2010 (A/65/575), stated that, upon enquiry, it had been informed that an assessment of programme criticality in high-risk areas entailed ascertaining exactly who was on the ground and what they were doing, with a view to balancing the value of the programme against the additional risk required to deliver it. In paragraph 13 of that report, the Advisory Committee noted that the High-level Committee on Management had established a separate working group to study the issue of programme criticality and that the working group was composed of representatives of the member organizations of the Chief Executives Board with large field operations, namely, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP), as well as representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and the Department of Safety and Security. The working group had been tasked with defining the levels of programme criticality and developing a common framework for decision-making within the guidelines for acceptable risk, and was due to present its recommendations to the High-level Committee on Management at its 2011 spring session.

3. Accordingly, the Advisory Committee emphasized the importance of the guidelines for acceptable risk as an important part of the security risk management process. Mindful of the need for accountability at all stages of that process, the Committee trusted that the work under way on the question of programme criticality would result in a common framework for decision-making that would indicate, inter alia, who was responsible for taking such decisions.

4. Subsequently, pursuant to resolution 65/259, the present report provides further information on the evolution of the Working Group on Programme Criticality and on the work undertaken to date to develop a programme criticality framework. It should be noted that the report provides an interim update on the activities of the Working Group and does not include its final conclusions. Although significant progress has been made by the Working Group, its work is still ongoing. Its final conclusions have yet to be reached and will therefore not be available until after the Working Group has reported to the High-level Committee on Management in 2013, following a thorough review of the roll-out and assessment of the programme criticality framework. In that regard, it is to be noted that the Department of Safety and Security is not leading the inter-agency Working Group and therefore cannot determine the timetable. UNICEF is leading the Working Group, having been directly mandated to do so by the High-level Committee on Management.

A. Background

5. For many years, the United Nations has been criticized for sometimes applying security processes in an inflexible manner, making the Organization too risk-averse. At other times, the Organization has been accused of placing personnel at unnecessary risk. In response to this criticism, and on the basis of the realization that the Organization needs to be able to deliver results under difficult security circumstances, the United Nations system has developed a series of tools to better balance security risk and opportunity.

6. In April 2009, the Chief Executives Board approved the United Nations security management system guidelines for acceptable risk (acceptable risk model). Later field testing of the guidelines identified the need for greater clarity on programme criticality. In June 2010, the High-level Committee on Management established the Working Group on Programme Criticality, chaired by UNICEF. Its aim was to define four levels of programme criticality and develop a common framework for informing decision-making within the Guidelines for Acceptable Risk.

7. Since its formation, the Working Group has developed a framework and a proposed implementation plan. The framework includes a methodology and a tool for informed decision-making while determining the programme criticality of activities carried out by United Nations personnel. The programme criticality framework will be used to determine the programme criticality level for specific activities within a given geographical location and time frame. The programme criticality level will then be used in the acceptable risk model to ensure that United Nations personnel do not take unnecessary risks and that those who remain in-country work on the highest-priority activities, in accordance with United Nations strategic results. The framework will also allow country-level programme

managers to design programmes and activities taking into account predictable, known and acceptable risks.

8. The programme criticality framework was developed through extensive consultations at the Headquarters and field levels, including field testing. A key element of the framework is its integration with the new United Nations security management system and, particularly, its value as a tool for implementing the newly adopted "how to stay" approach. The aim of the framework is not to ensure that the United Nations stays at all costs, but rather to ensure that the programmes and personnel remaining in-country are working on the highest priority functions and programmes, which in turn are defined as those supporting the strategic objectives of the United Nations system.

9. In September 2011, the methodology and tool of the programme criticality framework was presented to the High-level Committee on Management at its twenty-second session, at which it was approved for decision-making within the guidelines for acceptable risk. The High-level Committee recommended that the programme criticality framework be rolled out in at least 12 countries by April 2013 and that a consolidated progress report, including lessons learned and recommended adjustments to the methodology and tool, be submitted to the High-level Committee at its 2013 spring session, following a preliminary update at its autumn 2012 session. The selection of 12 countries could be adjusted if so required by changing security conditions. At the same time, the High-level Committee affirmed that the roll-out of the framework was the responsibility of the United Nations collectively and would be undertaken by a programme criticality coordination team comprising members of the Development Operations Coordination Office, FAO, ILO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNHCR, WFP, WHO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Safety and Security, with the leadership and coordination support of UNICEF, subject to the availability of funding. The High-level Committee tasked the programme criticality coordination team with developing a detailed funding proposal with an implementation plan and budget for the roll-out of programme criticality training. Funding remained essential to cover the costs of roll-out and to ensure that all related activities were implemented on schedule. It was noted that, should sufficient funding not be made available on time, it would delay the start date as well as scheduled training activities and expected results (see CEB/2011/5, para. 50).

B. Current status

10. In accordance with the recommendations of the High-level Committee on Management, which were subsequently approved by the Chief Executives Board at its autumn 2011 session at the same time that it adopted the report of the High-level Committee at its twenty-second session, a programme criticality coordination team was formed, comprising members of UNDP, WFP, the Development Operations Coordination Office, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, FAO, the Department of Safety and Security, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNAIDS,

UNFPA, ILO, UNEP and the Department of Political Affairs to roll out the tool for use in 12 countries. This phased roll-out would ensure that those countries that were most in need of programme criticality reviews could use the framework in a timely manner while receiving technical support from the programme criticality coordination team.

11. The previous field testing of the programme criticality framework identified the need for a web-based tool, including a tutorial module, to support the provision of accelerated training to all country teams on a global basis. Priority would also be given to mobilizing funds and expertise to develop the web-based tool, to be completed by early 2013. Resources would be sought from external donors to fund such development and the 12-country roll-out, with UNICEF leading the initiative and managing the funds.

C. Expected results

12. By the end of the first phase of the project, it is expected that 12 countries will have conducted programme criticality exercises employing the approved framework, that an e-tool will have been created for programme criticality and that regional capacity in the United Nations will be created to support further programme criticality exercises to diffuse knowledge more effectively throughout the United Nations system.

13. In early 2013, subject to the availability of funding, a review/evaluation of the training and related activities carried out in the first phase of the project will be undertaken to assess progress, lessons learned and feedback on the training methodology and results, including any refinements needed for the e-package, which will be used in an accelerated training process in phase two of the project.

14. During the next phase, it is intended that the programme criticality framework will be rolled out to all remaining countries using the programme criticality e-package, with support to be provided by regional mentors.

II. Actions to be taken by the General Assembly

15. **The General Assembly is requested to take note of the present report.**